

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

201359Z Apr 04

S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 04 ABUJA 000685

SIPDIS

NOFORN

E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/14/2014

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [NI](#)

SUBJECT: IMPLICATIONS OF CONTINUING MALAISE

REF: A. ABUJA 586

- [1](#)B. ABUJA 582
- [1](#)C. ABUJA 581
- [1](#)D. 03 ABUJA 2205
- [1](#)E. 03 ABUJA 1385
- [1](#)F. ABUJA 588

Classified By: CDA RICK ROBERTS FOR REASONS 1.5 (B) AND (D).

[1](#)1. (S/NF) SUMMARY: Recent coup rumors (Ref A) and political assassinations (Refs B and C) have added fuel to a fire that has been on slow burn among Nigeria's political class and Nigerians as a whole (Ref D) since last August (Ref E), but there seems little likelihood of a real coup in the next few months. Indeed Nigerian newspapers contend, and many Nigerians believe, that the recent Ref B "Mustapha coup attempt" was staged by Obasanjo to cover his political failures. Most Nigerians continue to be alienated from their society as well as their government, especially in the north. Virtually none see positives of the Obasanjo administration -- from transparency to the new NEEDS economic reform program -- as benefitting them or theirs personally. There has not been a military coup in large part because of Obasanjo's success in re-fashioning senior ranks into his own image, Christian/southern and believing in civilian rule. That could end up as the catalyst for a coup, if Buhari's suit overturns Obasanjo's 2003 election and Obasanjo ignores such a court decision, but Nigeria is more likely to muddle on through the muck toward whatever positives Obasanjo ends up producing before the next election in 2007.

[1](#)2. (S/NF) SUMMARY CONTINUED: Nigerians widely associate the U.S. with Obasanjo's administration, although the USG has done little to support Obasanjo's second administration, or to distance ourselves from its failures and continuing problems, or to push for correction of those problems outside what the GON is already doing. Washington did not support Obasanjo publicly on removing subsidies on gasoline, for example, and is perceived as critical of Nigeria's taking Charles Taylor from Nigeria. The USG is seen by Nigerians as having supported the flawed 2003 election, and when northern or Muslim Nigerians feel they are being ruled by "others," they lump the USG in with the GON, southerners, Christians and the West among those "others." Post analyzed Nigerians' mood at length in Ref D; this cable analyzes the long-term consequences for U.S. interests -- both regime stability and perceptions of the U.S. -- and what we can do about them. END SUMMARY.

-----  
OBASANJO'S PROBLEMS...  
-----

[1](#)3. (C) Since President Obasanjo came to power in 1999, the average Nigerian has seen little if any improvement in the quality of his life or in his ability to influence his government. Rampant unemployment plagues Nigeria's working class and most of those eligible for government pensions receive only empty promises. There have been few results from the GON's widely publicized transparency efforts, and many Obasanjo administration figures are widely thought to be involved in corruption, political assassinations, resource waste, budgetary fraud and general mismanagement. Those who are seen as clean and earnestly working for change are also seen as powerless to make fundamental changes in the Obasanjo administration, let alone Nigeria's future. As a result, Nigerian and foreign investment outside of the energy sector is minimal and unlikely to grow at rates necessary for fundamental change to come from economic progress.

[1](#)4. (C) The average Nigerian's view of his/her government is just as bleak as his/her economic prospects. Most Nigerians believe the 2003 federal and state elections were rife with fraud and, according to the influential Lagos Daily "The Guardian," fully 91 per cent of those it surveyed believed the latest 2004 local elections were rigged. Nigerians still favor democracy; we are far from the level Sudan reached in 1989, where Sudanese welcomed Islamic dictatorship turning out the crony-democracy of Sadiq al-Mahdi. But most Nigerians have gone beyond debating whether election results were manipulated, to questioning whether Nigeria is any more

democratic today than it was at the beginning of Obasanjo's first term. With more than 70 percent of Nigerians living in poverty on less than one dollar per day, and with a GON that Nigerians tend to see as an enemy unless it is giving him or her money directly, it is little wonder that most Nigerians feel alienated from their government as well as their society.

15. (C) The mood in the country, the President's widening rift with his chosen members of the National Assembly and conflicts with some PDP governors make continued infighting likely within the ruling party. Obasanjo has been taking actions for several months that hurt the interests of his Vice President, Atiku Abubakar, and many believe the President's supporters will get Atiku indicted for corruption within the coming weeks. Maybe not, as Atiku would be motivated to use his insider knowledge to attack Obasanjo and his family, and whatever Obasanjo or his supporters have on Atiku could keep them out of jail if Atiku succeeded Obasanjo. But Atiku's recent moves have reduced his political viability for 2007 (Ref F), even above whatever Obasanjo does. ANPP Presidential candidate Muhammadu Buhari is still waiting on the outside for the courts to overturn the 2003 results and order new elections, and an Atiku supporter on the inside of the Administration showed POLOFF what he claimed the "real" 2003 results -- Buhari winning 53 percent of the vote nationwide.

16. (S/NF) If Buhari wins his court case, Obasanjo will have a difficult choice to make. He could stretch out the matter in the Supreme Court, to which the Appeals Court's decision will be appealed no matter who wins, or let the "Independent National Electoral Commission" (INEC) dawdle so long organizing new elections that another court will judge the case moot. But Obasanjo is just as likely to disregard an adverse election tribunal ruling and insist that he serve out his term of office "for the good of the country," depending on a military he does not trust to keep the peace and, more importantly, protect his government. He has done everything possible to remake the senior officer corps into his own self-image -- Christian/southern and committed to civilian rule -- and keep it loyal by a tight budgetary leash, but these could be his undoing. The overwhelming majority of the Nigerian officer corps remains committed to civilian rule, not their civilian ruler. A growing minority of these financially marginalized officers question whether the current regime is in fact a democracy. That minority could achieve critical mass if forced to choose between Obasanjo and civil strife on one side, or supporting rule of law and getting paid on the other.

17. (S/NF) The recent "security breach" (Ref A) highlights a continuing concern among Nigerians: that Obasanjo is inclined to see foreign affirmation as more important for his political survival than serious reforms in either the political or economic arenas. According to a family member, Obasanjo has little faith in the Brigade of Guards which garrisons Abuja, or in the military leadership in general. One Obasanjo relative showed POLOFF a text message calling for "all politicians" to come to the President's Ota farm for Easter services to show "solidarity and pray for the survival" of the regime. The Personal Assistant to Chief Alex Ekwueme, Obasanjo's rival for the 2003 PDP nomination and a prominent Igbo politician, told POLOFF that Ekwueme had been "ordered" to Ota for that gathering. The Assistant said Ekwueme "would go along because he is afraid for his safety," but another politician who attended told POLOFF that less than twenty people gathered for the Easter services. Even many of Obasanjo's own relatives did not show.

-----  
...HAVE BECOME OUR PROBLEMS  
-----

18. (S/NF) While the economy burns and lack of trust in public institutions is the smoke, President Obasanjo is busy playing to the international community. Opposition politicians and much of the public question the legitimacy of Obasanjo's mandate and await the result of Buhari's legal battle. The President continues to seek foreign affirmation, which he receives for his economic team's nascent program if for little else, but it is unclear whether Obasanjo plans to take the difficult and, sometimes painful, decisions necessary to put Nigeria's economy on the right track. Some of the Embassy's Nigerian contacts speculate that the President's economic advisors will be sacked when there international community starts asking tough questions about performance rather than just accepting the GON's statements at face value. It does not help that Nigeria's publicly announced economic statistics for estimated 2003 GDP growth vary by several percentage points and are not reliable. Obasanjo privately has expressed frustration that his economic reform program has not received more public support, nor understanding from western governments. To shore up what he perceives as weak or non-existent support, Obasanjo has taken the unusual step of arranging for his economic team to address the foreign intelligence community.

19. (C) This is a critical time in U.S.-Nigerian relations. The USG is widely seen as the sponsor of Nigeria's "democratic" process and is widely accused of supporting Obasanjo and the past flawed elections against the will of the Nigerian people. The wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and the global war on terrorism as a whole are seen by many of Nigeria's 60 million or more Muslims as a war against Islam, and feed their more important feelings that the USG is part of an "other" ruling them that includes the GON, southerners, Christians and the West more generally. Faced with these two realities of Nigerian public sentiment, U.S. policy should play more to the polity than to the elites.

110. (C) Our long-term interests are in Nigeria achieving a transparent and accountable political process, and a transparent and robustly growing economy, as well as continuing common approaches to regional energy and security issues. Our policy should reflect the first two aspirations as much as the latter two already achieved, even more reason to favor the polity over any specific politicians. Helping Nigerians build long-term national stability is the only way to maintain our current benefits. While this is not greatly different from our current professed policy, the change is in emphasis. In the past, we did not plan for and work toward progress, but rather hoped for it. Pursuing this policy would require becoming more proactive in the pursuit of our goals rather than passively offering money and allowing the mistakes to continue.

-----  
STARTING TO SOLVE THEM  
-----

111. (S/NF) Six years is long enough that the current system should have begun producing measurable results. On the political side, our ignoring the shortcomings of the 1999 elections, ignoring the warning signals that INEC would fail a second time (in the interest that 2003 elections be on time) and then ignoring the flaws of 2003 election, have spent a lot of money but not produced more democracy in 2004. There are not many positive results on the economic side yet, either. We must address Nigeria in a clear fashion, increasing our public comment on both successes and failures. Where the "successes" are belied by reality, we need to say so. Even so, it is important to remember that influencing Nigeria requires that we balance strong but private criticism with unequivocal public comments that do not force a negative reaction from Nigerian institutions naturally averse to outside criticism.

112. (C) In the Nigerian domestic arena, we need to focus on good governance and transparency both economically and politically. Since we cannot be sure how the Nigerian situation will evolve over the next few months, we need to emphasize a mantra: "It is the process, not the person." Depersonalizing our approach will allow us to maintain relations with all the players in the process. In emphasizing our commitment to transparency and good governance, we should hold out for real progress, and not settle for paper commitments. Any assistance provided to the Nigerian government should come with an appropriately strong level of Nigerian public oversight and access to the processes (not to be confused with oversight and access by implementing partner NGOs, which are part of the system and often not Nigerian). These actions should serve to improve the USG's image with the general public and to convince the increasingly alienated citizens of Nigeria that they have a stake in the process.

113. (U) Our principle targets should be:

-- supporting civilian rule, including a continuing demand for INEC transparency and independence;

-- strongly, but with a critical eye, supporting the NEEDS economic development and reform program;

-- demanding rule of law and supporting the federal judiciary, judicial independence and reform;

-- strengthening checks and balances among the three branches of government in politics and economics; and

-- demanding and promoting anti-corruption efforts, including strong political and program support for the ICPC and EFCC to be independent, unbiased and effective.

114. (C) We should also continue and strengthen our outreach to Nigeria's Muslims and manage our negative international image. To do so, we will need a message to deliver, not merely a prettier or more expensive envelope. This effort is one best coordinated with our global efforts to convince Muslims that our foreign policy is not naturally anti-Muslim, although success in Nigeria will not outpace our successes with Muslims worldwide, nor entirely remove our identification in Nigerian Muslims' thinking with being part

of the "other." The bridge to overcome being seen as part of their opponents is in our support for real democracy in Nigeria.

-----  
NIGERIA IS NOT A BASKET CASE  
-----

15. (S/NF) There is much to build on. Most Nigerians may not be benefitting yet, but the economy is statistically growing and there is much potential in the NEEDS development and reform program. President Obasanjo's Economic Team is trying to make headway on the anti-corruption and transparency front, perhaps as Obasanjo's legacy, and is already setting out economic policies that could have a very positive impact in the future. Conversations with private sector risk assessors indicate that the Obasanjo regime's intentions on economic reform are considered credible. Extraordinary efforts by the Finance Minister to pay outstanding debt have resonated particularly well recently with the foreign investment community.

16. (S/NF) The USG needs to be more active. When the Obasanjo administration takes good steps, we need to give more public support for those steps. When the Obasanjo administration fails to take important steps -- such as not submitting huge All-Africa Games contracts to its own internal "Due Process" review, or stuffing the "Independent National Election Commission" with non-independent commissioners -- we need to make ourselves heard on those, too. We need to position ourselves as simultaneously the GON's best friend and most persistent critic.  
ROBERTS